

Chapter 28

Rethinking the Idea of Sustainable Development in Africa

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ABSTRACT

Africa has a long history of exogenous development initiatives usually directed at addressing various developmental challenges in the continent. For instance, at the dawn of the 21st century, there was the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) meant to address the indignity of poverty especially in Africa. After that, came the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). Like the MDGs before it, the objective of NEPAD was to eradicate poverty and place Africa on a sustainable process of development. The latest in the list of these development initiatives was the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) meant again to address the issues of poverty, hunger, health, gender equality, among others. However, in spite of this long history of exogenous development initiatives, Africa remains largely underdeveloped – a pointer to something intrinsically and specially wrong with Africa. This chapter therefore calls for a more endogenous approach to tackling African development challenges as the continent has peculiar problems requiring endogenous solutions.

INTRODUCTION: CONTENDING PERSPECTIVES ON DEVELOPMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY

This author hopes that his topic which is 'Rethinking the Idea of Sustainable Development in Africa' will be better appreciated if we first understand, though not in their entirety the ideas of development and sustainability. Therefore we ask: What is Development?

This author in 2018 had observed elsewhere that the term 'development' is a multidimensional concept judging from the fact that it enjoys a mass of contextual definitions emanating from different disciplines. It is a term that is defined and understood along so many lines of human experience. Thus

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we talk about economic development, cultural development, educational development, moral development, infrastructural development etc.

Therefore, development has economic, cultural, practical, social, human or personal dimensions. However, most people understand development only from the angle of economics and infrastructural provisions. They view development as advancement and growth only on economic and environmental conditions of peoples and nations. That explains the reason why it seems the only yardsticks employed in determining a nation's level of development at any given period are the Per Capital Income (PCI), National Income (NI), Gross National Product (GNP) and the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). With these economic tools, economists measure only incomes accruing to nations and peoples within nations, while using indices such as economic growth rate, income of the population, level of school enrolment and level of industrial production measured against primary production among others. Noteworthy, is the fact that the above economic tools employed in measuring levels of development represent only quantitative indices of development. They provide information only on the total wealth of a country, material living conditions of the people, values of goods produced etc., and they neglect entirely issues bothering on the quality of life of the people, such as decent accommodation, level of calorie intake, clothing, education, healthcare, social amenities and others. Consequently, the only nations considered as developed are those that have outstanding growth levels in most of the quantitative indices over a given period, whereas all those that trail behind others in the quantitative measurement are called 'underdeveloped' and sometimes 'developing' as a sign of courtesy. Perhaps, it is the above lacuna in our conception of the meaning of development, that prompted S.O Opafole (1998;160) to remind that:

Parameters for measuring or determining improvement in the quality of life of a country's citizens include food availability and affordability, water supply, clothing, shelter, health-care, wholesome environment, human dignity, literacy, employment, security, education, transportation, availability and affordability of energy and communication.

It is very regrettable and disappointing that in many countries of Africa, most of these human parameters are visible absent due largely to endemic corruption in the continent. Again sense of duty and responsibility is also lacking among a good percentage of African population and the consequences are very glaring. For instance, Nigeria is in a very terrible security situation at the moment. Human lives are wasted daily because of separatist agitations and unholy activities of militant groups and organized criminal gangs. Available online statistics have shown that in 2019 alone, one thousand, two hundred and forty five (1,245) persons died in agitations and terror related attacks. This very ugly situation is direct consequence of corruption, abandonment of duties and responsibilities, lack of proper education, especially moral and values education. There cannot be security which is one of the important indices of development where large percentage of a people's population lacks a sense of moral and ethical values. It may not be out of place to say that Nigeria and indeed the whole Africa's development crises are caused primarily by moral and ethical underdevelopment of her citizens. Moral decadence, not only destroys human capacity for good citizenship but also peace, security and real development of the people. As a matter of fact, no economic advances are made where the citizens have no sense of duty, and lack the right attitude to work as well as sense of patriotism which engenders a feeling of moral responsibility towards society.

Therefore for any development drive to be meaningful, it must be people-oriented. Every development initiative or drive which neglects the quality of life of the people cannot be said to be meaningful.

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